

Canyon takes, touches lives

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HEBER CITY — Personal knowledge of crippling accident victims who have traveled down Provo Canyon is prompting a Wasatch County commissioner to support the state's design for the controversial U.S. 189 improvement.

Commissioner Pete Coleman also is criticizing a Utah County citizen's group for its opposition and threat of a lawsuit.

"I've known almost every county resident who has been killed or injured on the Provo Canyon road and it's very emotional.

"I can't conceive of two lanes being safer than four, like some of those people are claiming," said Coleman, chairman of the county commission.

Coleman was referring to allegations by a Citizens for a Safe Community headed by Brigham Young University professor David Magelby.

The group charges that plans for

the new road in the canyon designed for two lanes with long passing lanes will be less safe than the existing two lanes.

The proposed state plan will not include dividers between traffic.

The Magleby group also criticizes increased truck traffic using 800 North in Orem and Provo's University Avenue, to get from the canyon road, U.S. 189, to Interstate 15.

But Coleman counters that the state built 800 North in Orem with four lanes for just that purpose: to get the traffic off State Street and University Avenue and to provide easy access for trucks from the mouth of the canyon to the freeway.

Wasatch County residents are urging state representatives to improve U.S. 189 from the mouth of Provo Canyon to its junction with U.S. 40 in Heber. The Wasatch group has pushed for that improvement for more than 16 years, according to Joyce Dudley, a spokesperson for proponents of the im-

(See CANYON, page 3)

CANYON: Citizens recall canyon injuries, deaths

(Continued from page 1)
proved road.

"The present plans are the same plans we saw in 1980, with a few refinements," Dudley said.

"Not one voice was raised in opposition until about last January. Statistics for 1982 show that there was at least one accident every other day. There was nothing that you could put your finger on as a common cause except that the road is inadequate for the traffic."

Heber City Mayor Gordon Mendenhall has also voiced concern about the road.

"Our people drive up and down Provo Canyon constantly, to jobs, to shop, to conduct business and to do temple work. And a lot of people come here from Utah County, for business and recreation.

"People tell me they have close calls every time they travel on that road. Almost everyone I talk to has been personally acquainted with someone who has died or been injured on that road and they are afraid for their own lives and for their families."

Residents vividly remember accidents that have caused deaths or serious injuries.

Wasatch County resident Ila Hulse still has flashbacks of her

experience Jan. 24, 1983. She was driving home with her mother, Sylvia Cobbley, after shopping in Provo.

She was driving cautiously in the slush when, just above the Sundance turnoff, she saw a semi-truck coming toward her out of control. She pulled to the side as far as possible and stopped. But the truck jack-knifed and hit her van, which caught fire.

Both women were trapped, but were freed just before the van exploded. Cobbley died 90 minutes later and Hulse received serious head, arm and shoulder injuries. She owns a beauty shop in Heber but her doctor has told her she will never be able to style hair again, only manage the shop.

With the help of a psychologist, flashbacks of the horror that took her mother's life are becoming less frequent. She is determined that one day she will even drive down the canyon again.

Dee Mecham's brother, Tom, was killed on a curve just below Bridal Veil Falls on July 4, 1949, and his cousin, Garn Mecham, went off the road where some repair work was going on, and drowned in the river just below the

Sundance turnoff in 1953. Tom's son, who was about 14-months old at the time of the accident, was seriously injured. He suffered minor brain damage and was left with physical handicaps.

Mecham said he and his only brother had been close, working together on their family farm and doubledating as teens.

"I don't even have anyone in my family, who is my age to get together and reminisce with."

Wanda Kinsey Murdock and two friends drowned in the river when their car went off the road at the county line in 1951.

Mrs. Murdock was 18 and eight-months pregnant. Her sister-in-law, Ardith Webb, recalls that investigating officers found evidence that a truck had hit the car and caused the driver to lose control, but they were never able to prove it.

Reed Stephens lost his first wife, to the canyon road in 1981. Karen Stephens was 42 when she was killed in a head-on collision, just below Bridal Veil Falls. One of their four children, Jan, who was 16, suffered serious head injuries which almost took her life, and still has scars on her face and neck.



Phil Shurtleff Photo

Provoan Injured in Canyon

Saturday night at about 11 p.m. Norma Morgareidge of Orem failed to negotiate a curve in Provo Canyon and rolled her car, becoming pinned inside the car, according to Utah Highway Patrol Trooper David Decker.

She is listed in serious condition today at Utah Valley Hospital. The car was traveling

westbound out of the canyon and went off the left side of the road hitting a tree, said Decker.

"She was pinned in the car by the tree and was unable to be moved until a wrecker came a pulled the car away from the tree," he said.